

Falling Rain

Andrivette

Copyright Information

This ebook was automatically created by [FicLab](#) v1.0.102 on December 14th, 2023, based on content retrieved from www.fanfiction.net/s/6928478/.

The content in this book is copyrighted by [Andrivette](#) or their authorised agent(s). All rights are reserved unless explicitly stated otherwise. Please do not share or republish this work without the express permission of the copyright holder.

If you are the author or copyright holder, and would like further information about this ebook, please read the author FAQ at www.ficlab.com/author-faq.

This story was first published on April 22nd, 2011, and was last updated on January 9th, 2015.

FicLab ID: Lrlw8kcc/lq584vjp/50000E5U

Table of Contents

| |
|-----------------------|
| Title Page |
| Copyright Information |
| Table of Contents |
| Summary |
| 1. Foreign Mood |
| 2. Silver Tongue |
| 3. Foolish Thing |
| 4. Crimson Hide |
| 5. Behind It |
| 6. The Promise |
| 7. Last Time |
| 8. Heading Out |

Summary

title Falling Rain
author Andrivette
source <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/6928478/>
published April 22nd, 2011
updated January 9th, 2015
words 7,121
chapters 8
status Complete
rating Fiction T
tags Adventure, Complete, Drama, Fanfiction, Final Fantasy IX, Freya C., Games

Description:

The events of Freya's life before Fratley left Burmecia.

1. Foreign Mood

Falling Rain

a Final Fantasy IX fanfiction by andrivette

“Again.”

The rain pounded on the top of Freya’s head, her hair plastered in stringy curls to her face and neck, her chest heaving. Jeriah watched her passively, and she knew he was ready to deflect her for the millionth time.

She swung her lance around and he jumped easily into the air, his foot landing squarely on her chest and knocking her back on her ass, the lance clattering to the ground. Freya gasped for air, the rain choking her.

“Your defenses are pathetic, Freya,” he decided. “You will practice for another hour.” Then he turned tail and walked away, toward the back steps of their home. Freya wanted to cry in her rage at him, at how much she hated him, but it would not matter if it was

raining or not—this behavior was stomped out of her. Another reason she had to hate him.

The warm light flicked on inside, and Freya watched it only a moment, her bones trembling from the stinging rain and exhaustion.

He must have wanted a boy, but he was too proud to ever say it, Freya knew. The great Captain Jeriah of the Burmecian Dragon Knights would always get what he wanted, no matter if he had to squeeze it out of his own daughter after his wife had failed to squeeze it out of her.

Freya leaped into the air, her spear tip pointed straight at the ground as she fell back to Gaia and rammed it in the stone.

“When will it be time?” Freya snapped.

“You’re not nearly ready,” Jeriah replied. “Your legs are strong but the strength of your arms and magic is pitiable at best.”

“My magic is far superior to any one of those lazy good-for-nothings you call knights!”

“Not so,” he growled, a warning glint in his eyes. “You’ll find my newest prospect has potential in far greater measure than yours could ever hope to be as long as you keep your sniveling attitude. Today we’re off for his initiation and I expect you to have improved your swing when I return in two days’ time.” Freya watched his retreating form from where she stood in the training ground.

“That Fratley,” she muttered. “I hope the dragon chews him up and spits him back in your face.”

Freya held the string of jewels up to her throat and stared at herself in the vanity. It was such a dainty little thing, and it did not look at all right on Freya with her short, jagged hair and her coarse, straw-colored training tunic. Once, though, it must have been beautiful around the neck of the woman that had been Jeriah’s wife. Freya had been the only child of that woman’s to survive, and her birth had taken the life of her mother and that of all the siblings that were meant to follow her.

She had been delivered alone into Jeriah’s hands, a tiny delicate thing just like this necklace, but all traces of that vulnerability and tenderness had been

ground out of Freya just as surely as the purpose had been stolen from this piece of jewelry when its owner's life ended.

Freya heard the front door slam and she stuffed the jewels back in her mother's jewelry box, her heart racing. She expected Jeriah to call for her, to admonish her when he found her rifling through his dead wife's belongings, but his steps completely passed the door and she heard the click of a handle down the hall.

Freya cracked the door open and slid carefully out, shutting it as slowly and quietly as if she were a ghost and daring to breathe just as much as one. "Two," she heard from Jeriah's room, and she stepped carefully to her own room, opening and closing the door as if she had only just exited.

"Father?" she called. He did not answer her, and so she continued down the hall until she paused at the outside of his bedroom. The door was slightly ajar and Freya could see Jeriah stepping in and out of frame, and she pressed her palm against the stone, swinging it fully open.

He saw her and Freya expected to be scolded for intruding, but he did not say anything to her but "Two." There was anger in his eyes, but not at all at

her it seemed, and it mingled with something strangely unfamiliar, an emotion she had never seen in her father before.

Freya stood still, an odd sort of fear gripping her as she had no idea how to interact with Jeriah in this foreign mood.

Then he stopped pacing and looked at her, and he said, “Two. He slayed two, Freya.”

“Your Majesty,” Freya said, staring at her knee on the cold floor.

“Freya,” he greeted her, and she lifted her head. “Please rise. You look well, if not a bit . . . worn? I expect your father has been working you to the bone,” he chuckled.

Freya allowed herself a smile as she stood. “I bring news from him, my liege. Fratley slew a Grand Dragon during yesterday’s excursion. Two, in fact.”

“Two!” the king exclaimed. “Incredible! Wonderful news! Tell your father we shall have the ceremony tomorrow at midday.”

Freya bowed again and made to leave.

“Freya,” he piped, and she turned back to him, taken aback by the roguish twinkle in his eye. “I look forward to your day.”

Freya grinned back at her king with all the love she held for him as she replied, “I, as well, my liege.”

A/N: I’ve decided to make these first chapters relatively short in order to keep them impactful and organized... ish. LOL. We’ll see how it goes. Enjoy!

2. Silver Tongue

If Freya had any notion in her mind that Jeriah might not drive her as hard because he would be busy with his new recruit, the next few days quashed that entirely. Jeriah had not only continued her normal training, but it further intensified.

It was that damn Fratley's fault, Freya knew. It had to be. Ever since he had returned, Jeriah had seemed preoccupied when not training her, but he was more than happy to treat her with a harsher severity than ever during her now-extended sessions, driving her to standards that even she could not meet despite being accustomed to pushing herself.

It was the days when Freya trained with the knights that she hated the most. There was no doubt that Fratley was a great warrior, and oftentimes he assisted in training the other knights. This got under Jeriah's skin immensely, and as if to compensate, he drove Freya to exhaustion.

"Stand, girl," Jeriah barked after knocking her down yet again. She struggled to her feet, the spear in her hand a burden to her weary muscles.

Jeriah was prepared to come at her again when a voice across the training ground called, “Captain!”

He paused, turning to the voice. It was one of the castle soldiers. The man continued, “The king requests your presence, sir.”

Jeriah frowned. He did not like being interrupted from his training sessions, and they all knew it.

“Allow me to take over, sir,” came a nearby voice, and Freya turned her head just enough to see that it was the very man who was the cause of all her current distress: Fratley. A scowl fixed on her face.

“Fine,” Jeriah said as he turned to leave. “Maybe you can teach this girl a thing or two.”

Freya remained hunched over, panting, as Fratley stepped in front of her. Their eyes met, and Freya blanched for the briefest of moments. He was smiling at her.

She held her spear out in front of her.

“Your skill is very impressive for fifteen,” Fratley said. She narrowed her eyes at him. ‘Be wary of who you aim your weapons at, though. I am not going to spar with you. You’ll only hurt yourself as tired as you are. However,’ he approached her, and she

shifted away slightly, but he circled around to her back. “Your stance is too top-heavy.” His hands found her torso, gently adjusting her position. She wanted to whip around and knock him away from her, but she was in too much pain; her muscles trembled beneath his hands, and even as she tried to hold the position he had set her in, her shaking intensified. Fratley grew quiet, then he said, “That’s enough. Freya, please, sit.”

She sighed as her rump met the stone, lowering her head and allowing the melodic pattering of rain to blot out the whirlwind of thoughts in her head.

Then Fratley spoke again. “If Jeriah would allow, I would like to train with you tomorrow. What do you think?”

Freya grit her teeth. “As if I’ve a say in the matter.” She tipped her head back, catching the water in her mouth.

“Shouldn’t you have?”

Freya swallowed and laughed. “This is not a democracy, *Sir* Fratley. I’ve as much choice in my training as you’ve choice in the color of your hair.” It was yellow like cream, she noted.

“Perhaps not,” Fratley proposed. “He does love you.”

Freya snorted. “Save that silver tongue for my father. It’s of no use here.”

Freya thought she had her fill of surprises when Jeriah had actually agreed to Fratley’s request to personally train her, but she was wrong.

What surprised her more was that Fratley and her father were absolutely nothing alike.

“Good, Freya,” he praised her. She knitted her brows at him, but said nothing. “But don’t allow your offense to take away from your defense. You have impeccable defense when you focus.”

What? *Impeccable* defense? Freya? There was no such thing.

There always needed to be more.

Or so she had thought.

She came at him again, and he dodged her, leaping high into the air and landing behind her. She swung around, and he leaped away again.

Freya thought she hated Fratley. She hated the way he had talked to her like he was so much better even though he was only three years older than her, barely her superior as far as age was concerned. He was far too willing to assist the common Burmecian no matter what the task and he seemed to have little understanding of the dignity and importance of his position at all. He was constantly taking it upon himself to help with her father's job and Freya was surprised that Jeriah had not already wrung his neck.

But as for his skills? Even Freya was impressed at his prowess. Yet Fratley was not braggart at all.

She respected him, but even worse, she thought she may be starting to like him.

Fratley stopped Freya before she could make her way home.

"If I may, Freya," he said, "when is the last time you went to the harvest celebration?"

"It's been years," she admitted, narrowing her eyes at him. "Why do you ask?"

"It is tomorrow, and I should like not to miss seeing you dance," he answered far too casually.

“You wish to see me dance? You’ve seen me dance a million times now, Sir Fratley, here on the training ground.”

“A different dance, then. Where maybe you don’t look so tense,” Fratley countered.

“Tense?” she repeated with mild disbelief. “Well I should look tense in one of those silly little frocks, bouncing around in the midst of a hundred other people looking just as ridiculous.”

Fratley laughed, and for some reason it made Freya smile. “Would you come anyhow? If only for the chance to see me bounce around, looking ridiculous? I promise you won’t want to miss it.”

“You may be right about that, Sir Fratley,” Freya agreed, and she walked away with the smile still plastered on her face.

3. Foolish Thing

Jeriah would never approve.

For once, though, Freya did not care whether or not he did. It was not as if anyone was ever going to wear the clothes again, and rightfully they should have been Freya's to use as she wished.

Jeriah could punish her for days, even weeks, but Freya would enjoy herself tonight.

He had already gone to greet the king early, leaving Freya to prepare in peace as she contemplated the way the dress hugged her curves.

She had never worn such a beautiful outfit in her whole life, and had hardly realized how strangely . . . *feminine* she actually was. Freya tried to imagine how the woman who last wore this dress might have looked in it; certainly far more decadent than she, the ghost-woman's snow-white tresses perfectly wound atop her head and stuck with a shimmering comb, jewels sparkling about her neck and wrists. Yes, her mother must have been a divine flower for a wet blanket like Jeriah to fall in love with her.

Freya pinned the loose cloth around her bosom, turning about as she inspected herself. No, she was not nearly a divine flower, but she looked more ladylike than she ever had before.

She grinned smugly at her reflection. Fratley would be in for a surprise.

She had not expected so many people to be there in the king's ballroom—but then, Freya had not expected a lot of things to happen the way they were happening right now.

Not the least of which being the fact that she was still wearing her mother's—

“Silly little frock?” she heard, and whipped around. Fratley was gazing at her, wide-eyed. “I’d say not.”

Freya blinked at him.

“That is . . . ,” he breathed, grasping for words. “You look beautiful, Freya.”

She half-smirked. “Good evening to you, too, Sir Fratley. This,” she gestured at her dress, ‘is just an heirloom I’d yet to make proper use of.’ She could

feel Jeriah's glare already. "So, remind me how to do this dance before I make a *complete* fool of myself."

He smiled back at her, warmly, and guided her gently by the arm to the very side of the dance floor.

For likely the first time in her life, Freya was panting from exertion and not dying to quit, but opposite: she was happy, even eager, to continue.

Dancing with Fratley was joyful and exhilarating; she felt free, truly free, to be herself.

The moments were more wonderful than anything had ever been for her, and she wished this night would never end.

Laughter echoed in the courtyard, dulled by the incessant chatter of rain on stone. It felt strange to exit such a shining and bustling place of giddy leaps and ale and cheer and back into the same world Freya had always known: gray, monotonous, chilly.

But the celebration was over, and it was the only world Freya had to go back into.

Yet—

Fratley still had her by the arm as he led her down the steps and away from the castle, and his warmth reminded her that all they had experienced had not simply been a fleeting dream.

She gazed at him, her eyes clinging to the small smile he still held as he concentrated on guiding them out of the palace and back to the town square where Freya knew they would inevitably part ways.

Something in Freya's chest clenched at the thought, and she did a very impulsive thing then.

"Fratley," she began, having completely forgotten use of his title in the midst of her own thoughts, "I don't want to go home."

He smiled wider as he looked at her. "It's been a wonderful night, hasn't it? If only such things didn't have to end, believe me, I would stay—"

"Fratley," she interrupted him, her tone pleading, but voice significantly softer as she said, "take me home with you."

Fratley was visibly shocked. “Freya—I—that hardly seems a proper thing to—”

She blushed deeply, and he knitted his brows in embarrassment as it became clear to him that he had mistaken her meaning. “Oh, Freya, I—Nevermind.”

“I just want to—to get away from my father,” Freya explained. “I want to spend more time with you. Fratley, I think—” she paused, fighting something in herself. “Forgive me for saying such a foolish thing, Fratley, but I think I may . . . I may be beginning to love you.”

Freya realized that they had stopped as the rain and one another became all that existed in that moment, and she searched his eyes, desperate for knowledge that she could not know until the very moment when he opened his mouth—

“Freya. . . .” His thumb caressed the back of her hand. “I believe that I may feel the same for you.”

She exhaled, resting her body softly against his.

“But,” Fratley continued, “you understand I can’t take you home with me tonight. I feel that would be more trouble than you or I need to spoil the wonderful time we’ve had.”

Freya nodded into his chest. “I know. I just wish you could.”

“Perhaps one night not too far off, I shall, Freya.”

4. Crimson Hide

It was Fratley she had seen in her dreams but her father's voice that awoke her.

“Get up—now, Freya! We battle *now*!”

Freya's eyes snapped open and she lurched from bed, as startled as she was confused. “Father—what?”

“Monsters have slain the gate guards and they're invading Burmecia! Get your spear now! I must leave for the front line!”

Freya had her weapon—but what of armor? Her cloth training tunics would be useless, ripped apart like butter under the claws and teeth of mist monsters.

“But father, what will I do for armor?” she called to him just as he had disappeared from her doorway.

“You will use mine!” he answered, distantly, and that was all. He departed as quickly as he had come, before Freya could ask anything more or even make sense of what he had told her.

She was not yet a knight, but he was trusting her to assist in defending their home. For the first time, her father was putting faith in her.

She could not disappoint him. She would do as she asked, and she would be quick.

Once inside his room, she delayed only a second before the brilliant crimson hide that lay sprawled upon his bed.

Her father had not meant that he had left her a simple armor, an armor she assumed would have been one of his previous ones.

He had left her his captain's armor. He had left her the better protection, and she could hardly fathom it.

But she could not tarry any longer.

Freya was all at once amazed and alarmed at what she was doing as she slipped the cloak over her arms and fastened it—then she attached the belts that held the metal plates to her arms and the shield to her front, the shield beautifully painted with the Crescent family's coat of arms—the blue and cyan of Burmecia and the white and yellow that stood for her patronage.

Freya was indeed a Crescent; but a Dragon Knight she was not.

She stared apprehensively upon the helm that bore the trademark dragon fins, the helm that rightfully belonged on her father's head.

Then, her stomach churning into knots and the urgency of the situation bearing into her mind, she lifted it onto herself.

Freya could smell the blood before she saw it—but, oh, when she did . . .

The streets of lower Burmecia were in chaos, soldiers wearily slinging their lances at fiends and the ongoing struggle between life and death—

How could it have happened? *How?*

Freya ran just in time to deflect the attack of an oncoming basilisk onto an already-wounded soldier, and with several well-aimed jabs, she had disabled the creature.

It was a nightmare to see her home ravaged in such a way, to see the soldier she had just saved limp over to a fallen companion and cry out his name in

anguish. It gave her vertigo, the reality of what was occurring right before her eyes—

But Freya knew that there could be no time for anguish—not unless she wanted to watch more before her fall.

She continued down the street, the wash of rain drowning out the moans behind her.

The sight of a living comrade was the only balm to Freya's monster-singed eyes, and she called to him, unable to continue feeling so alone in the midst of the pain of battle.

“Dan!”

He yanked his spear from a corpse and turned to her voice, and the look about him at the sight of her was nothing short of horror. “Freya? What in Gizamaluke's name—”

“Where is my father, Dan?” she panted.

“Your father?” he repeated incredulously. “I thought you *were* your father a moment there. I haven't seen him—nobody has, I reckon.”

“What you do mea—” she started, before the reality of his words crashed in on her in with startling clarity. Where was her father?

“Fratley!” she cried. “Where is Fratley?”

“He’s near the entrance of the city, Freya, helping to keep more monsters ou—hey! Wait, where are you going?”

Freya ignored his shouts after her. She had to find Fratley—surely he would know where her father had gone, surely he would recognize him. Surely Fratley would know exactly what to do—surely—

Blood, *oh*, the smell of blood all around her—

And the cry—

It was not Fratley that she found first. It could not be—

It would be the Ironite dragon curled behind the quaint little house, hovering above the ground, its claws slathered with blood and arched, preparing for the next strike—

And the next not taken, for Freya would take it herself.

And her weapon, her knees, fell to the ground, for it had been her father all along that this creature angled its death upon.

And she should have known, she should have known, because everything had been so *wrong*—

“Why did you leave me your armor?” Freya screeched. “Your protection? Why were you so foolish!”

His eyes turned on her, weakly.

“Hello, daughter,” he said when he saw her. “Freya, you look—”

“Why!” she insisted, battering her hand into the stone. “Why, why, *why*!”

“I thought nothing of it—I thought I would be—” Jeriah choked, coughed, clearing his throat of blood. “But I was wrong. It doesn’t matter, though. I can see that armor is where it belongs now.”

“It belongs with *you*!” she denied.

“No,” her father countered, strongly enough to silence her. “It’s yours now, Freya—as I intended. Use it well. You’ll do great things . . . I always knew that.”

But Freya could hear them coming, and she snatched up her spear, intending with every bit of her to make them—

“Stay away!” she wailed.

But it was not the monsters, and Freya could see Fratley’s eyes as they met hers, and then—

It wasn’t real. It was nothing.

Blackness—nothing.

5. Behind It

No one had thought it best, but Freya insisted that she come to the ceremony, and she saw Fratley delegated as captain of the Dragon Knights—awarded his new title, in honor, “Iron-Tail” Fratley—and she heard the town speak of her father and his goods and his sacrifices and his noble spirit and everything that she supposed they had believed her father to be wrapped up in a neat and tidy package.

Freya had insisted that life resume as life was meant, and Freya trained with the Dragon Knights under Fratley.

But she did not speak to him.

Freya had a mission that must resume, else she would lose everything she knew, and even as she walked by Fratley’s side on the way to Master Gizamaluke’s grotto she was focused, blindly.

There would be no marriages on that day—only a battle to be won.

Fratley's hand met hers as she jumped up through the hole, attempting to steady her on her feet. It was the first time they had touched in many days.

Freya pulled her hand back and stared before her.

They were in the forest on Popos Heights, the most they had to worry about for now being the Garudas until the trees ended.

That was where the test would begin—where the Grand Dragons lived. Since times long past the Burmecians had been fighting them, proving their strength against the mighty creatures to become part of the elite order.

Only by defeating with his own spear the most powerful dragon known to Gaia could one be a true Dragon Knight, anointed by their blood, with the dragon's fierce will now coursing through their veins.

She knew Fratley was still looking at her as if she should not be here, but he knew as well as she did that she had become a better warrior now than she had ever been.

She was ready. They were all ready.

Freya walked on.

Where the trees began to part, blinding light shone in—light that Freya was still not quite accustomed to seeing.

Burmecia was where she had lived her whole life, the dark and gray city where the rain never ceased and crops at the edges of the town flourished—crops she had never tended to herself. The rain had been an advantage for the Burmecians, warding away many beasts and causing trouble for any invaders that were not accustomed to the constant downpour. The Burmecians were suited to their environment, and it gave them, for the most part, peace.

The first time Freya saw the sun in its true, blinding yellow brilliance, it baffled her. It was the color that only fire had shown her truly, and everything under it was lit by the blaze. She was younger then, having escaped from her cage long enough to get away from the city and see the world further outside, and of course her punishment was harsh even then.

It was probably only out of his fear for her life.

She occasionally had taken the time to walk toward the very outskirts of town and search for

glimpses of that fire through the thinning rain. But now, still not having adjusted to the sun and the colorful vegetated world, with the open air and grassy plains before her absorbed in its piercing gaze, it seemed only a hindrance to her.

She was not here to fight the sun—she was here to fight for her place in the world.

The green beast had immediately decided that it did not want them on its cliff side and even now it reared back, preparing its claws for another poisonous strike, tiny rivers of blood flowing down its legs from spear-cuts.

Freya and one knight jumped out of its line of fire while the rest of the troupe flanked it, and then even he abandoned her side, leaving her before the creature.

She could see the rage growing in its eyes, and it was when her hair raised that Freya began to realize the extent of the danger.

“*Now!*” she could hear Fratley shout amidst the static electricity that now seemed to multiply in the small space, and Freya poised herself before leaping

high into the sky, a half-dozen Dragon Knights just behind her as they all grew airborne for long enough to avoid the lightning, and as they descended, Freya knew just what was intended.

She aimed her lance for the throat—and when it penetrated, she tore it back, leaping away from the fountain of blood that she had created.

She stood by the body, burning crimson—*his* crimson—and she had won.

They camped in the woods, intending to leave out for Burmecia at dawn after a night's brief celebration for the victory and rest. Freya had set up for the night further from the fire than she should have, but she couldn't bear to be so close to the rest.

Fratley came and sat by her side as she was sharpening her spear.

For a while they sat in silence, but Fratley finally spoke, "Freya, you can't continue this."

She set down her spear, not bothering to look up. "Continue what?"

“*This—*” he tried, and when she looked at him, he sighed. “Nevermind. I will see you in the morning. Goodnight, Freya.”

She stared after him, bitterly wishing for something and yet not able to decipher what.

“—and you are henceforth a Dragon Knight of Burmecia.”

The spear left her shoulder, then, “Rise.”

Freya lifted her head and gazed into her king’s face—he was smiling at her, almost with *pride*—

She smiled back, she *had* to, and it ached like nothing else ever had.

She drifted along the celebration, numbed to a perfection, an *art*, smiling and laughing and drinking and eating all when necessary so that absolutely no one could see behind it—not even her.

She walked home alone—she insisted so—at midnight, the familiar lull of rain engulfing her as she padded over the stone, slowly, carefully.

She opened the door of her home and for the first time since the harvest celebration she went somewhere other than her room.

Freya removed the hat and set it upon his bed, watching how the rain trickled down the sides. She undid the straps about her shoulders and shrugged off the shield, laying it upon the covers, water soaking into the sheets. She pulled the sleeves of the cloak off of her arms and held it out before her, and she spread it out next to all the rest.

The rain danced upon her roof.

If he could see her now, worthy of all that that armor stood for—just like he wanted.

Freya ran so hard she thought her legs might give out, the sprays of water arcing off her feet and the two moons staring on before the door finally swung open and Freya collapsed into his arms, the tears too much for her to carry alone.

6. The Promise

When Freya awoke that morning, the drizzling of rain upon Fratley's roof did not seem intrusive, but comforting. Fratley had taken her in so quickly, so *easily* that he must have been waiting for her all along.

And she had never been alone.

She curled up against him, warm in his embrace, and for the first time in what felt like ages, Freya was sure she was happy.

And, oh, the glorious days they spent together afterward. Training with the other Dragon Knights had become a joy and all the new recruits now looked to her and Fratley as their guides. Freya had become steadily even stronger—though far, she knew, from Fratley's immense battle prowess.

She admired him, but more than that. The both of them could see it in each smile they tossed the other's direction, could see it in the lightness of their gazes when they set eyes upon each other, could feel it in each time their hands met or he gently grasped her shoulder in happiness of a practice well done.

And Freya grew healthier, too. It was the gossip of a great many Burmecians to see the skinny, moping little rat that Freya had been bustling cheerfully over the stones each morning to Fratley's house to ensure that he was adequately fed with plenty of hot fresh bread and muffins with rich slabs of butter and jam and thick steaming slices of ham, and again each evening to prepare an equally satisfying supper. As such, the both of them happily ate well and together, and everyone could see the change as clearly as they saw the bright sun drawing in to replace the grey at the edges of town.

What everyone could not see, however, was the sometimes nights that Freya and Fratley spent together in secret and how Freya would steal off in the hours before the sunrise to escape suspicion, or the mornings in which Freya and Fratley would travel to the outskirts of town to watch the sunrise together or look at the lively green things springing up all over the plains, the beautiful flowers of all colors pushing up out of the ground with the spring air and sunlight feeding them.

Perhaps most importantly of all was that Freya had finally grown to accept her father's passing and, with Fratley at her side, grew somewhat accustomed to the lack of his presence. The difficult times were

dwindling away and she looked at her father's death with more of a gentle understanding and a growing fondness of what had been—but even more, hope and delight for the future.

She had taken her father's love of her for granted before, but now she was sure that he would be proud of her—happy for her. It was he, after all, who had let Fratley into her life at the start, who had allowed Fratley to train her and the two to grow close. Maybe he had known all along.

Freya sucked in her breath, jerking the folds of the dress straight and smoothing it down. It had been a year (was it really that long?) since the last festival, since the night that she and Fratley had confessed their feelings for one another.

She had actually filled out quite a bit more since the last time she had worn this dress, she reflected, inspecting herself in the mirror again.

She had let her hair grow out quite a bit and it was reasonable now to put it up, the perfection of which took longer than anything else considering how inexperienced she was with anything remotely feminine.

Freya imagined that the young woman in the mirror looked more like her mother than ever.

And now, tonight was the night. *Her* night.

Freya and Fratley would be an official couple—the whole of Burmecia would know.

Freya entered the ballroom beaming, and how could she not, knowing what was to come?

She had seen him a million times before, but when she saw him that night, everything had changed. When she met him in the room, her heart skipped, and when his hand touched hers, it expanded in her chest.

She loved Fratley, and she wanted the whole world to know—she couldn't wait a moment longer.

They danced all night, and before their friends and comrades they shared a kiss that Freya would never forget.

Freya inhaled her first breath of the morning, the elation of the previous night still settled in her every limb, and she reached out to share it with him.

Her hand fell too far, upon cool sheets.

She lurched upright. “Fratley?”

The room was empty.

Freya scrambled out of bed and fled the room, her heart nearly leaping into her throat until she saw him standing by a window in the sitting room, his back to her.

“Freya,” he said without looking, “there’s something I must tell you.”

Whatever it was, Freya felt that she did not want to hear it.

“Tell me,” she forced out against her better instincts.

There was a long pause in which Freya watched Fratley and Fratley watched the ribbons of water trailing down the window pane.

“I need to leave Burmecia,” he finally said, his tone flat.

Freya tried to ask why, but something swelling in her throat choked her and she had to swallow it down.

“We’re a small and humble kingdom, Freya. But out in the world, there are powerful nations. I am afraid for Burmecia. We are enjoying so much peace, and I don’t wish to lose it.”

“I don’t understand—”

“I have to learn more,” Fratley continued, turning away from the window only to pace the room. “I have to learn and teach Burmecia to be stronger with the knowledge I might find by traveling around the world.”

“Then I’ll go with you,” she insisted.

“You can’t. Burmecia needs you.” He turned to her at last, and the darkness etched on his face nearly burned her. “I need you to stay—to look after things.”

Freya shook her head wildly. “There’s nothing to look after if you’re not here!”

“I understand how you must feel, Freya, but I need you to trust me. You can’t come with me, but I can’t stay here and take that risk.”

“You can’t go, you just *can’t*.” Freya crumpled to a chair, trying to fathom it—how she could possibly exist without him.

But she couldn't.

His hand rested warmly against hers, but it only made her stomach turn. He was telling her that soon, she would not feel that touch anymore.

“I will return. I promise.” Freya looked up into his eyes, and despite the blur of tears, she knew they were sincere.

It was all she had to cling to.

7. Last Time

Freya had all but forgotten Fratley's idea to leave the kingdom. Everything continued as it had been, and over the next few weeks, Freya had hope that Fratley would forget about it and brush it off as a silly idea.

But he had not forgotten.

She could tell by the subtle change of his expression that something was different that day. She repressed the thought—surely nothing could be wrong! They were happy, happier than they'd ever been. But the entire day had been spent with a somber quiet between them, the frown set on his face itching Freya beneath her skin.

It was dark when they made their rounds over the city for the last time, when Freya couldn't bear that frown any longer.

“What's been on your mind, Fratley?”

He paused by the brilliant stone carving, and she waited, watching the back of his head for several agonizing moments.

He finally turned to face her, uttering only one word.

“Beatrix.”

“Beatrix?” she repeated, her heart nearly catching in her throat. She had never heard of a Beatrix before. What on earth did he mean? For a split second, she could feel her heart irrationally tensing to break—another woman? No, she couldn’t jump to conclusions.

“Yes . . . Beatrix.” His gaze wandered to an indeterminate place above the palace, droplets of water splattering his upturned face. ‘I hear there are many fierce warriors out in the world—some more powerful than even I.’ He caught her eyes again. “Beatrix of Alexandria, in particular. They say her swordsmanship is the best in the land.”

She knew where this conversation was leading—it was the same place it had led the last time they spoke of power outside of Burmecia.

“Sir Fratley,” she began, forcing the words out so that her voice would not waver, “do you still insist on going on your journey?”

“Yes,” he affirmed, then, quickly, “please understand, Freya.”

It wasn't about understanding. She could understand his intentions, and even his methods. She even understood why he himself wanted to be the one to go.

She understood perfectly. It was the matter of acceptance that was difficult to grasp.

“Right now, Burmecia is at peace, while other nations are slowly but surely gaining power. I don't know if my spear alone is enough to protect Burmecia, which is precisely why I must go out in the world.”

But he *wasn't* alone, she wanted to cry out. But it was moot. She understood only all too well.

“Sir Fratley,” she breathed, “I don't think I can live on my own—not without you.” The words felt pathetic, but her plea was regrettably genuine.

A smile tugged at his mouth; it was the first one she had seen on him throughout the whole day, and this felt like the least appropriate time for it. Fate had a way of being ironic at the worst of moments.

“Freya, you're going to be fine. Trust your strength, and have faith in your destiny.”

She knew he meant to be reassuring, but the words were empty promises from vague concepts. Her destiny? Why should she have faith in the unknown?

“Once I complete my journey around the world, I will return to Burmecia.”

Around the world. The *world*. The phrase stuck in her mind like glue, cornering her with the threat of years—maybe even decades—without him.

It was a knife against her throat, and it nearly stopped her from being able to speak.

“Then promise me,” she uttered, fighting against the strain of mounting fears, “one more time, that you will return.”

“I promise.”

Then he turned from her, and she sank, unable to watch him slip away into the night for the last time.

8. Heading Out

She was waiting again.

Life had always been a game of waiting. She was waiting to be good enough, waiting for life to change, waiting for a solid moment of peace. Waiting, it seemed, for the next tragedy.

She had always accepted Fratley's judgment, gone along with his ideas. Even at the cost of losing him now, she conceded. Freya had never simply *conceded* to anything in her life before, not since the moment she was born — not to death, not to defeat, not to her father's disapproval, and not to the loss of him, either. With Fratley, she gave in so easily, so quickly.

She loved him, but love was not an excuse for not being able to fight.

This was a battle now, she believed — a battle that, so far, he had the upper hand in. But the moment she stepped through the city gate and ventured into free air and sunshine, she resigned herself to fight not to lose him just as she would fight any foe.

Freya had of waited long enough, and now she was done.

A/N: Thank you everyone for your support — and know this is not the end of Freya's story! It's been a long time since I visited her tale, and my writing, along with this story, has changed since then. While I don't necessarily want to rewrite what's here (at least, not anytime soon), I've decided it would be better to keep what's coming as a separate, standalone story. Freya's adventures searching for Fratley will begin in a new fic soon!

Table of Contents

| | |
|-----------------------|----|
| Title Page | 1 |
| Copyright Information | 2 |
| Table of Contents | 3 |
| Summary | 4 |
| 1. Foreign Mood | 5 |
| 2. Silver Tongue | 11 |
| 3. Foolish Thing | 17 |
| 4. Crimson Hide | 23 |
| 5. Behind It | 30 |
| 6. The Promise | 37 |
| 7. Last Time | 44 |
| 8. Heading Out | 48 |